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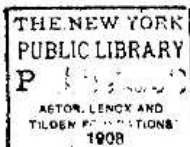
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PAUL V. C. BAUR & FRANK THILLY

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VOLUME I



NUMBER 4

THE
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STUDIES

EDITED BY
FRANK THILLY
Professor of Philosophy

EILEITHYIA

BY

PAUL V. C. BAUR, Ph. D.
Acting Professor of Classical Archaeology

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EILEITHYIA

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ABBREVIATIONS EMPLOYED

C. I. A.: Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum.

C. I. G.: Corpus Inscriptionum Græcarum.

Él. Chr.: Lenormant et de Witte, *Élite des Monuments Céramographiques*.

I. G. I.: Inscriptiones Græcarum Insularum.

I. G. S.: Corpus Inscriptionum Græcarum Græciæ Septentrionalis.

EILEITHYIA*

CHAPTER I

IDOLS OF CHILDBIRTH

The oldest images of divinities found on Greek soil are idols of a most crude shape, belonging to the prehistoric period, which dates not later than 1500 B. C. It is very remarkable that those idols which represent females are by far more common than those representing males. The female idols are found not only throughout the Greek world, but also in the Orient. In Assyria, for instance, we have evidence that they were common as early as the fourth millennium.¹ They play a most important part in the earliest history of religion, and demand therefore our closest attention. We frequently hear the terms 'Babylonian Istar' or 'Phœnician Astarte' applied to this female type of idol without sufficient reason. It is not my intention to deal with the vexing question as to their proper terminology and original home, but we must, and this is of far greater importance, have a clear conception of the nature and character of these primeval female divinities. To attain this end it is necessary, on the one hand, to make a careful study of the manner in which they are represented; and on the other, to trace the development of the type. We shall thus reach the interesting result that the goddess—I do not attempt to give her a name—was worshipped for many centuries without interruption, from prehistoric times to the best period of Greek civilization.

*This work is a translation and revision of an article published by the author in the *Philologus*, Supplementband, VIII., pp. 453-512.

¹ See v. Fritze, in *Jahrbuch d. k. d. archäolog. Instituts*, XII. 1897, pp. 199 sqq.

The most primitive example of a goddess of this type is a lead idol found in Troy.³ It represents a nude standing female divinity, with arms crossed on her breast, with long curls over her ears, and with strongly marked vulva. Noteworthy is her necklace, consisting of a number of rings. Every candid and unprejudiced observer will recognize in this figure characteristic features of a female goddess of generation.

A similar type of female figures, but of terra-cotta instead of lead, has been found on the island of Cyprus. These divinities are called '*Brettidole*' by the German archaeologists, because their bodies have the shape of a board. The peculiar characteristics of the Cyprian type of prehistoric idols are the large breasts, the exaggerated indication of the vulva, and the hands laid on the abdomen.⁴ Especially common on the island of Cyprus is another type of oriental divinity, considerably later in date, a type which covers a long period. Here again the goddess is represented as standing and nude, but instead of laying her hands on her abdomen, she presses her breasts. A combination of the two types is occasionally found, in which the right hand presses the left breast, while the left hand covers the vulva.⁴ These gestures indicate clearly enough that we have not only a goddess of generation, but also a nourishing goddess before us. The later type, of which we have just been speaking, is not, however, limited to Cyprus; it is found in all parts of the Greek world. Quite fre-

³ For an illustration see Schuchhardt, *Schliemann's Excavations*, transl. by Eugénie Sellers, p. 67 fig. 60; Hoernes, *Urgeschichte der bild. Kunst in Europa*, p. 178 fig. 30. In Hoernes's illustration the hooked cross or swastika on the vulva is not given, for on cleaning the idol it was discovered by von der Steinen that this sign was a modern forgery. On this point see Hoernes, *l. c.* p. 178 note 1; p. 339 note 3; and p. 344, where he cites v. der Steinen's article, *Prähistorische Zeichen und Ornamente*, Sonderabdruck aus der *Bastian-Festschrift*, Berlin, 1896, p. 7 note 3.

⁴ For illustrations see Hoernes, *Urgeschichte*, p. 180 figs. 32-34.

⁵ Perrot et Chipiez, *Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité*, III, p. 555 figs. 379, 380; *ib.* p. 450 fig. 321; *ib.* p. 557 fig. 382. Cf. Hoernes, *Urgeschichte*, p. 93.

quently it is modelled not in full figure, but in bust form, or, to speak more accurately, the upper part of the body is represented as a mask. As such it is found, for instance, in Boeotia in the fifth century B. C. When we take up the study of the votive offerings to the divinities of childbirth, we shall have occasion to refer once more to this remarkable mode of representation as a mask or *προτομή*. It seems quite certain that the worshippers of the Cyprian terra-cotta board-shaped idols, and of the later limestone and terra-cotta idols of more human form, considered their divinity to be endowed, above all else, with maternal qualities. As a goddess of generation and nourishment she would naturally be the deity under whose special protection mothers would be willing to place themselves. As a motherly goddess she would furthermore be a care-taker and cherisher of children, a divine nurse or Kourotrophos. That she was in reality considered as such is proved by the monuments themselves, on which she is sometimes represented with a child on her arm.* It is a very old idea that the goddess under whose protection mothers and children stand, should be represented in her images as a mother or as a nurse herself. And so it is only natural that the goddess who produces fruitfulness in marriage should herself be treated as a fruitful divinity.

The prehistoric birth-giving and nourishing deity occurs not only in lead, terra-cotta, and lime-stone, but also in marble. On the islands of the Aegean sea, and even in the Peloponnesus, idols made in the nobler material have been found. This marble type is known at present under the name '*Inselidol*,' i. e., 'Island-idol,' and is, as I have stated above, usually identified with the Babylonian Istar or the Phoenician Astarte. That we are here

* Hoernes, *Urgeschichte*, p. 182 figs. 35, 36. In the Museum at Karlsruhe there is a very old idol with board-shaped body, carrying a child which stands on its shoulders. For other illustrations of Cyprian Kourotrophoi, see Perrot et Chipiez, *Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité*, III. p. 202, fig. 144; p. 553 fig. 376; p. 554 fig. 377. These figures are draped, and belong to a much later period than that with which we are concerned.

dealing with a divinity parallel to those already discussed is apparent from the characteristic nudity, the highly developed breasts, the broad hips, and the large vulva. She is at times even represented in a state of pregnancy.* Where such is the case, some archaeologists have been tempted to conclude that a human being is meant by the image, and not a goddess. But the necklace and especially the diadem with which these figures are adorned forbid such an interpretation. A divinity that had not suffered in person the pangs of childbirth during some period of her existence could not be popular as a goddess, whose chief care it was to take charge of the actual processes of birth. This conception of the gods is common to all peoples in the early stages of their religious development. The 'Island-idol,' besides being a goddess of generation, was also worshipped as a divine nurse or Kourotrophos, for she too is sometimes represented with a child in her arms.†

How wide-spread the type of the maternal goddess actually was, is seen from the terra-cotta figurines found in Thracian mounds. Here she is not represented as standing, but as seated on a primitive throne. Again she is entirely nude, has big broad hips, a remarkably large vulva, but exceedingly small breasts.‡ I shall not attempt to name these prehistoric idols, for I firmly believe that they were worshipped in different localities under different names, just as in later times there was any number of Kourotrophoi, lesser goddesses of childbirth and deities of healing in general. For my purpose it is quite unnecessary to find names for these divinities. It is of far greater importance to realize that in the prehistoric period the most important deity is not male, but female, and that it is her chief function to prevent bar-

* Hoernes, *Urgeschichte*, p. 184 figs. 37, 38. For an island idol as Kourotrophos, see Reichel, *Ueber Vorhellenische Götterculte*, p. 81 fig. 34 = Perrot et Chipiez, *Histoire de l'Art*, VI, p. 740 fig. 332. The child is standing on the head of the goddess.

† See Hoernes, *Urgeschichte*, pl. III.